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SUBJECT: Long March: Searching for God in Fujian

Ref: A) Guangzhou 13384 B) Guangzhou 13385 C) Guangzhou  
13562 D) Guangzhou 14707 E) Guangzhou 14818 F) Guangzhou  
14936

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two churches near Zhangzhou's city  
center denote Zhangzhou's relatively relaxed approach to  
religious practice. The city's new Catholic Church sits  
prominently in the city center, replacing a nearby older  
church torn down in recent years. The church pays for its  
upkeep by renting out the bottom floor as a pool hall. A  
smaller Protestant Church built in 1918 reminds visitors of  
the area's religious history. Both churches each have  
approximately 1,000 worshippers attending services each  
week. END SUMMARY

12. (U) During Consulate Guangzhou's "Long March" (ref A) the  
Consul General and Congenoffs visited Zhangzhou Prefecture  
in southwest Fujian Province. After official meetings in  
the city Congenoffs requested to visit a neighboring  
Catholic church they had seen the day before. Foreign  
Affairs officials took the group to see both the  
Catholic Church and a nearby Protestant Church as well.

Zhangzhou: Capital Z Rhymes With P, Stands For Pool  
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13. (U) In the heart of Zhangzhou city a giant white Catholic  
church towers above the treetops of a city park. From a  
distance, the building looks like a typical European style  
church with three domed towers topped with golden  
crucifixes. From closer up, however, visitors also see a  
modern billiard parlor occupying the first floor of the  
building.

14. (U) Arriving unannounced at the gate of the new edifice,  
Congenoffs were met by a groundskeeper who answered  
questions and gave the group a tour of the chapel and its  
grounds. The sanctuary is a large, high-ceiling concrete  
structure with a single level of seating, and spacious front  
area for the priest and worship leaders to lead masses.  
While simple in decor, the walls hold a large crucifix  
holding a statue of Christ, and pictures of the stations of

the cross. A large number of prayer books were stacked in the rear of the church. The ornate cathedral-cum-pool hall was only completed in 2004 at a cost of RMB 2.5 million (USD 312,000). But while the spacious church is quite new, the congregation it services is not.

#### Not Exactly Gutenberg's Printing Press

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¶5. (U) The 1,000 parishioners that make up the congregation previously worshiped in a nearby church built in the late 1800s. That building served as the congregation's home until the Cultural Revolution when it was converted into a printing factory. The building later returned to the congregation in the 1980's and was used as a church until the early 2000's, when the land the church was on became designated for a new building development. The land that the current church is built was obtained in a land swap. When the church was razed to make way for a modern building, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) arranged for a land swap and assisted the congregation to obtain needed permits for a new church.

¶6. (U) Church leaders, including a priest trained in Shanghai, still owe RMB 500,000 (USD 62,000) to the contractor who built the facility. An amount offset by the RMB 200,000 (USD 25,000) of annual rent revenue provided by the first floor billiard parlor. The church has received no financial assistance from the government and has paid for the church from its own resources, according to the caretaker.

#### Salvation Versus Army

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¶7. (U) Not far from the opulent Catholic facility is a smaller, less prominent Protestant church. A tan brick building sits on the corner of two small streets, surrounded by a black wrought-iron fence. A plaque on the front of the church indicates that the Dongbanhou Church (named for the neighborhood in which it sits) was built in 1918. A local groundskeeper told Congenoffs that 1,000 parishioners worship at several services each week.

¶8. (U) Like the neighboring Catholic church, religious services in the building were suspended during the Cultural Revolution. During that time, the facility served as headquarters of the area's Red Army contingent.

#### Comment: Registered Churches Thrive Amidst Tolerance

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¶9. (U) Religious regulation in China varies by jurisdiction and by who heads the local office. Fujian Province appears to be less strict than Guangdong Province, possibly in part due to Guangdong's proximity to Hong Kong and the Falun Gong community based there. However, even within each province, the RAB operates at different levels of control and cooperation with religious institutions. Zhangzhou appears to be a place where assistance to churches has been facilitated, though that cooperation undoubtedly is based on the willingness of the churches to not stray from the government-organized church program. The prominent location of Zhangzhou's new Catholic Church is a reflection of this cooperation. Area Catholics in Zhangzhou are not forced to go to secret underground churches, but worship in one of the largest, most ornate, buildings in town. While a full range of religious choices is certainly not yet available to the residents of Zhangzhou, local residents worship openly in this thriving, albeit state-sanctioned, registered parish. Likewise, Protestant believers continue to fill pews at the well-cared for ninety-year-old Dongbanhou church. Perhaps one day soon, they too will build a new church on top of a pool hall.

